

VII TOWARDS A PSYCHOLOGY OF THE FORGER

The *SNML* differs from other forgeries of early modern books. It is a product of a mind that obviously goes beyond the pursuit of monetary profit through the investment of criminal energy. What the investigator is confronted with is not merely a product of economic interest but also of an intellectual and practical ludic drive that is obviously stimulated by other motifs. One can only speculate about the reasons for this type of forgery. Taking all elements together, it seems as if the forger (we use the singular, notwithstanding that a group of persons might be involved here) was working against a fictive enemy, an enemy that might incorporate the combined knowledge of specialists. It is our thesis that the book is a projected duel with the community of specialists. The hidden agenda of the making of the book might have been a clandestine satisfaction regarding the incapability of specialists to detect the forgery as such. The volumes *Galileo's O* in this light would have represented the hidden goal of the forger. He might have thought that after the publication of these volumes he had won this competition forever. If this suspicion about a mixture of economic and psychological motifs in the forger should be correct, the bizarreness of a number of phenomena might become explicable.

The peculiarity of the *SNML* unfolds on two levels. The first is represented by manners of production that differ from the standard theory of forgery. A "normal" forgery tries to get as close to the authentic objects as possible. This does not mean that forgeries of this kind follow a strict, or even slavish mimesis of the authentic form. To the contrary, in art history forgeries exist that try to fill a gap in the stylistic development of certain artists. The last example of this was the work of Wolfgang Beltracchi, who was convinced that he had grasped the technique as well as the intellectual goal of Max Ernst and that he was able to paint "true" works of a missing period: forgery as fulfillment.¹ But even this "development" of the original style follows the rule of proximity to the authentic.

The most basic departure from this rule lies in the fact that the *SNML*-forger did not try to simulate a regular copy, but one of the 24 examples into which the engravings had not been printed.² One of these examples, the copy from Rendsburg, was on the market through Christie's in June 2005,³ and the forger may have become aware of this class of copies through this example. In effect, it would have prompted the idea not only of using

1 Joshua Hammer, *The Greatest Fake-Art Scam in History?*, in: *Vanity Fair*, 10. October 2012.

2 Opere, X, p. 300, l. 94–97. Lists of these copies; Bredekamp, 2007, p. 155, note 12; Needham, 2011, p. 215, Paragraph "Etchings", last sentence.

3 Needham, 2011, p. 219, Nr. 16.

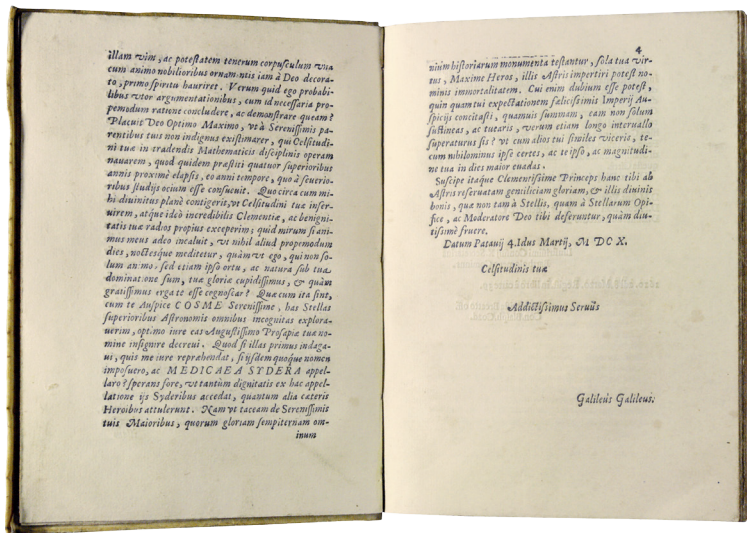


Fig. 1: SNML, pp. 3v and 4r.

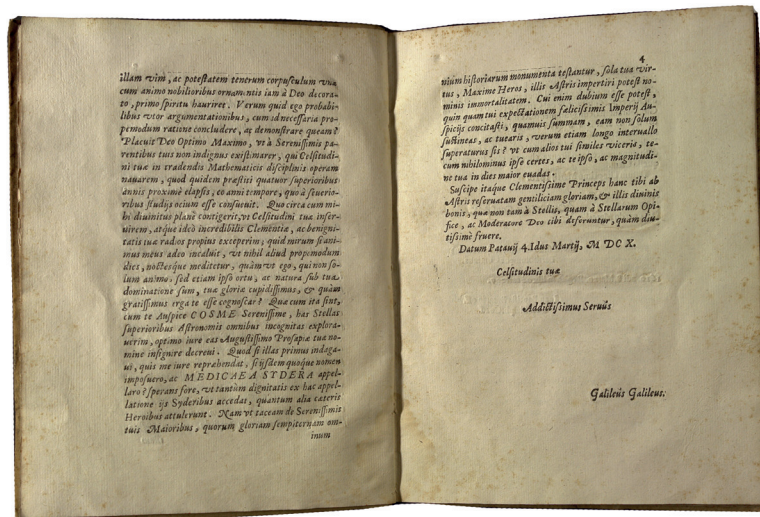


Fig. 2: Galileo Galilei, Sidereus Nuncius, Venice 1610, pp. 3v and 4r, Graz copy.

this exceptional case of the printed books, but also of pushing the exception further, to the first print of all copies: the proof copy.

The only way to get close to the proof copy is through a tree of errors derived from all available copies: the book with the highest number of print-errors, which were eliminated step by step in the process of printing the following copies, regularly comes closest to the first print. Bredekamp had observed that the Graz copy and the SN Graz to be closest to the SNML. Most significant are the pages 3v and 4r, on which in the Graz copy shows a total of 3 print-errors in concordance with the SNML (Figs. 1, 2).⁴ The new investigation has brought to light, that the SN Graz was not only closest to the SNML, but in certain parts its model.

4 Bredekamp, 2007, pp. 186–189.

This may be due to the simple fact that since 1999 the SN Graz has been available in digital form, which the forger must have had in his possession.⁵ But this explanation is not sufficient. As the forger obviously used the Graz-copy in order to simulate the lost proof-copy, he must have known, what Bredekamp only found out by means of a comparison of 12 copies; a number that Needham increased to 83.⁶

This alone, to say the least, is astonishing. What makes the goal of producing an exception even more perplexing is the decision to draw *disegni* into the open spaces of the pages 8r–10v (Fig. 3). Reduplicating a copy that lacks the engravings would have been enough for a very special forgery, but going on to include drawings meant to produce an absolutely unique book. The only known example that also has drawings is the one in Copenhagen, but the drawings of this *Sidereus Nuncius* are roughly sketched on paste-in slips, disturbing the regular sequence in an absurd manner.⁷ The drawings of the SNML, in contrast, adhere to the regular positions, changing only the direction of the terminator on

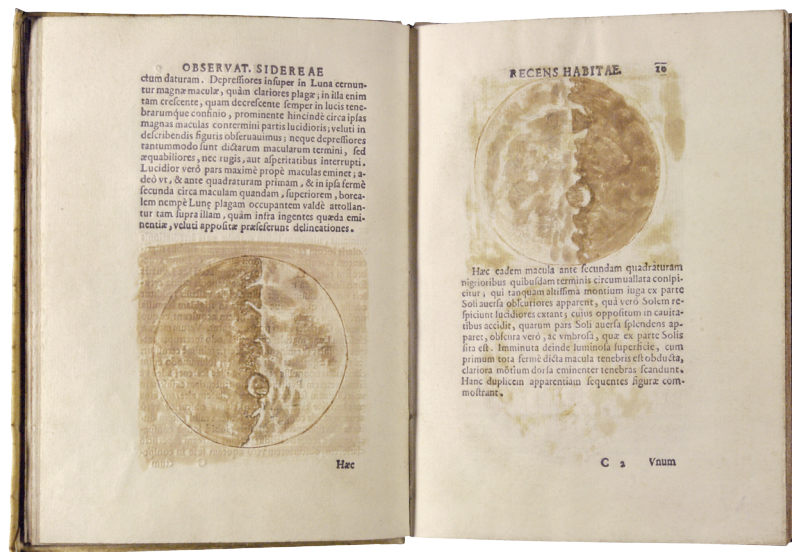


Fig. 3: SNML, pp. 9v and 10r.

page 10r, above. Owen Gingerich considered that this change may have been caused by a misunderstanding of the Florentine sheet with six moon-drawings (Fig. 4), where the middle-right position shows the same orientation.⁸ Bredekamp, instead, proposed that the position was the product of a lapse of memory, as Galileo did not have any idea of book-printing when he painted the sketches of his moon-observations onto sheets of paper that are now lost. In the light of the new revelations, Gingerich was right.

5 Information by Manfred Mayer, 5. November 2012.

6 Bredekamp, 2007, pp. 186–189; Needham, 2011, pp. 217–227; Graz: p. 219, Nr. 22.

7 Needham, 2011, p. 219, Nr. 14.

8 Gingerich, 2009, pp. 162–164.



Fig. 4: Galileo Galilei,
moon phases, water-
colour, 1610, BNCF,
Gal. 48, fol. 28r.

Yet, the curious fact remains that the drawings carry more information than the printed etchings, thus suggesting that the drawings were not at all created in an attempt to fill the empty spaces by copying the etchings, but that they instead show the models after which the etchings were produced.⁹ The forger, in effect, has intentionally simulated the model for the etchings, not copies after the etchings. This alone would have made the book something very special, but he was determined to produce an exception to the extreme.

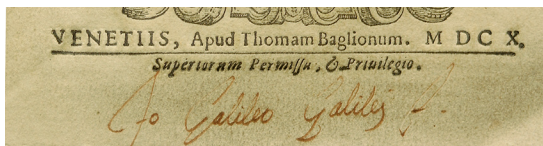


Fig. 5: SNML, title page
with bogus signature.

The same holds true for the signature on the title page (Fig. 5). Its style is so close to the position and the way Galileo habitually wrote that the forger must have himself performed almost all of the investigations that were carried out in order to examine the authenticity of the signature.¹⁰ But this is not the only puzzling aspect of this example of handwriting. What is most disturbing is once again the forger's determination not to reproduce the

⁹ Bredekamp, 2007, p. 202.

¹⁰ Galileo's O, 2011, Vol. I, pp. 31–38.

expected but to produce an original, never-before-seen specialty. This detail lies in the last letter, “f”. It is, as has been shown in *Galileo’s O*, driven into the paper with such a force, that the feather appears to have broken away, hindering the ink from flowing evenly onto the paper.¹¹ Once again the forgery broke the rule of forgery by not copying the expected and the regular, but by producing a detail that was exceptional. The proof of authenticity has switched from pedantic mimesis to constructive fantasy.

11 Galileo’s *O*, 2011, Vol. I, pp. 36–38.

